

# Railway Budget 1973-74\*

L. N. Mishra

At the outset, I must express my gratitude to the several Hon'ble Members who have participated in the debate and have made very many useful suggestions and comments. But for the time factor I would have very much liked to deal with all the points. The Hon'ble Members may rest assured that I will send them detailed replies on the points raised by them. During the short time I have at my disposal now, I shall deal with only some of the important points raised.

I shall first deal with the proposals for revision of fares and freight rates with a view to removing some misapprehensions that have arisen.

Some Hon'ble Members have said that since I presented the Railway Budget within a fortnight of my taking over the Ministry of Railways, I was not responsible for this budget. This is farthest from the truth. I affirm that the budget is my own and I take full responsibility for all the proposals made. Whatever proposal has been made has been done by me after fullest consideration and I own all of them.

As I pointed out earlier in my Budget speech, the staff costs, which form 60 per cent of our working expenses, have been steeply rising over the years. During the last three years, the staff costs have gone up due to sanction of three interim reliefs as a result of the recommendations of the Pay Commission, increases in daily and running allowances and implementation of the various Tribunal awards including that of Miabhoy Tribunal. The staff costs which were Rs. 495.5 crores in 1971-72 will be Rs. 532.6 crores this year and Rs. 567.46 crores next year. In short, the staff costs are going up by 7 to 8 per cent a year, even though the increase in the number of staff employed is going up only by 1 per cent. I may again emphasize that these figures do not take into account the likely effect of the final recommendations of the Pay Commission which we are yet to

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receive. The prices of coal, diesel oil, iron and steel, and other materials have also been going up steeply.

Hon'ble Members will remember that in spite of the increasing costs, there was no increase in third class fares for 1972-73. It is because of this increase in the cost of inputs that the existing third class fares have had to be increased by 3 per cent. There should not be even a shadow of doubt about the minimal effect of the proposed increase in fares for third class. I am, therefore, quoting certain specific instances — from Delhi to Amritsar, a third class ordinary passenger will have to pay only 25 paise more, i.e., Rs. 12.05 instead of Rs. 11.80 as at present. If he travels by a third class Mail or Express train, he will have to pay only 35 paise more, i.e., Rs. 15.80 instead of Rs. 15.45. For longer distances, say, New Delhi to Trivandrum, the third class ordinary fare is actually Rs. 1.30 less than the present fare, i.e., Rs. 57.65 in place of Rs. 58.95. Even if the passenger to Trivandrum travels by Mail or Express train throughout, he will have to pay only 15 paise more, i.e., Rs. 70.60 instead of Rs. 70.45.

#### **500 million Short Distance Passengers**

I would also like to draw the attention of the Hon'ble Members to the fact that there is no increase in the existing fares for the first 15 kms. for the third class passengers. One or two Members of this House were making light of this exemption and were asking how many third class passengers will be travelling for a distance of 15 kms. Let me tell them that there are 500 million such passengers who do travel only a distance of 15 kms or less. This is one-third of the total third class travelling public excluding season-ticket holders. Even in the case of other third class passengers, there will be only marginal increases over existing fares including the tax — not more than 25 paise for third class ordinary and 95 paise for third class Mail and Express trains.

I find that there is some criticism about our decision to levy supplementary charge for travel by certain selected super-fast express trains. We have selected only eight trains out of 220 Mail and Express trains running over the country. Hon'ble Members will agree with me that it is not fair to charge the same fares for the G.T. Express, which takes 39 hours 45 minutes, and for another Express, which takes 53 hours, for the same journey. The difference in the running time between these two trains is more than 13 hours. Again, it will not be fair to charge the same fare from Delhi to Bombay for the Frontier Mail and the Dehradun Express, because the difference in the running time between these two trains is nearly nine hours. There has been very heavy overcrowding in these super-fast trains and the proposed levy of supplementary charge is more



in the nature of dissuading the public, particularly short distance travellers, from travelling in these trains and adding to the overcrowding. By travelling in these super-fast express trains, the passenger saves not only valuable time but also expenses on meals, refreshments, additional sleeper charges, etc., compared to which the small supplementary charge of Rs. 1.50 is negligible.

I may repeat once again that all available seats in these super-fast trains will be fully reserved. There will, therefore, be no overcrowding and I am sure the long distance passengers will appreciate this.

### **Loss on Passenger Traffic**

I would also like to remind the Hon'ble Members that we are at present suffering a loss of nearly Rs. 63 crores on our passenger and coaching traffic. The proposed increases by which the passengers will have to pay only Rs. 12.45 crores extra over what they are paying now, do not bridge even a fraction of the wide gulf of loss of Rs. 63 crores.

I have truly kept the interests of the common man in mind and that is why I had not proposed any increases in rates for carriage of essentials like milk, fruits vegetables, fish, books, newspapers, etc. by parcel. In fact, there is absolutely no increase in the luggage and parcel rates for any kind of traffic.

I must, of course, admit that I have touched the upper class passengers a little more, the percentage increase in their case being, on an average, 7 per cent over the existing fares including tax. This, of course, is truly in keeping with our objective of tapping the affluent sections of the society a little more, to contribute to the General Revenues of the country. Some Hon'ble Members have criticized my proposals saying that with the equating of air-conditioned class fares with that of air fares, nobody will patronise the air-conditioned class. I do not think so, because travel in air-conditioned class gives a person plenty of rest. People who prefer to travel by train in air-conditioned class do so not for saving money. Besides, only a few places are connected by air whereas air-conditioned train service is available even for places which are not connected by air.

### **Goods Traffic**

Coming to goods traffic, our earnings in the next year are estimated at Rs. 785.27 crores but only Rs. 18.15 crores, or 2.4 per cent is the result of the increase in freight rates. Here again, I have touched only the low-rated commodities, which are being transported by the railways at a considerable loss. Even so I have taken special care to exempt the essential neces-



sities of life like foodgrains, salt, and kerosene oil from this increase. Further, all the commodities which are charged at in class 60 and above, have not been affected at all.

Hon'ble Members will appreciate that faced with the unenviable and onerous task of increasing the revenues of the Railways without, at the same time, increasing the burden on the common man, I have to attempt a delicate balancing act. My task would have been easier and more pleasant, if there were no agitations, no strikes and no bundhs. Even so, I have not attempted to bridge the full gap between earnings and expenses. There is still a gap of Rs. 8.65 crores which I have deliberately left uncovered.

### **Ticketless Travel**

I propose to bridge this gap by plugging leakages like ticketless travel, which has been referred to by several Members. It may not be possible to eliminate ticketless travel altogether in the next year or two, but I do hope to make a significant dent on this evil practice. Even as it is, ticketless travel in certain parts of the country is much less than others. If by intensive persuasion and strong deterrent punishment, I could bring down the extent of ticketless travel in certain areas to the levels in other areas where the incidence of this evil is much less, it would result in a sizable increase in the passenger earnings. Similarly, by checking thefts and pilferages and reducing the amount of compensation paid and by the general toning up of efficiency in operation, I shall be able to make some savings in the working expenses.

### **Essential Commodities Exempted**

The Memorandum circulated with the Budget documents explains in detail the proposals for increases in freight rates of commodities. That Memorandum also gives full details of the increase in the freight rates. The Memorandum also shows that the increase in the freight rate is a very small percentage of the price of the commodity.

There are on the other hand a large number of commodities the freight rates of which have not been increased at all. Among them are such essential articles of common use as sugar, tea, coffee, fruits and vegetables by parcel trains; fish, all varieties of textiles including handloom products, matches, bidis, cigarettes, tobacco, bidi leaves, books, newspapers, bicycles, petroleum oil and lubricants, soap, groceries, drugs and medicines, dyes and chemicals, utensils, iron and steel items, hides and skins, leather, raw cotton, raw jute, jute manufactures, machinery, non-ferrous metals like



aluminium, copper, zinc, brass and a host of other commodities apart from coal which has already been put on a special footing with an increase of only 3 per cent on it.

### **New Lines and Conversions**

Now I come to the question of new lines, conversions, doublings, restoration, etc. Hon'ble Members will recall that while introducing the Railway Budget I had referred to the need for the readapting of the classical concept of economic viability for initiating railway projects or opening new lines upto 60 kms. In our existing framework of viability no new lines can be opened unless the volume of traffic exceeds three million tonnes.

This is inherited from the British who wanted Indian railways to serve as a mere mode of transport for movement of troops and policemen within the country and for facilitating carrying of raw materials to port towns.

This philosophy is a hang-over of the colonial system where transportation infrastructure is expected to facilitate the movement of primary goods and raw material supplies to the Mother Economy. Over the twenty-five years of our Freedom, the concept of economic and social development has undergone far-reaching changes. Government is interested not only in sustaining the development of regions already advanced but in effecting a wider dispersal of growth by greater reliance on growth through "Social Engineering."

The process of development must subserve the interests of different groups, consumers and producers, traders and users, exports and national security.

### **Development of Backward Regions**

Over the years in all this process, the interests of peasants, specially the cotton growers of Maharashtra, Haryana, Punjab, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the rubber growers of Kerala, the jute growers of Bengal, Bihar and Assam, the tobacco growers of Andhra, to mention only a few, have been comparatively ignored.

It is, therefore, my intention to depart from the outdated fixed norms of economic viability so that the development of backward regions or the interests of the growers are subserved in a larger measure. If initial losses have to be borne for subserving these ends, these investments would still be worthwhile in terms of their long-run spread effect on the development of backward areas and of serving the interests of a large number of farmers and growers dispersed throughout this country.

I will say a word about conversion of M.G. to B.G. also. Members are aware of the evils of the dual gauge system and have rightly stressed for



an accelerated pace of conversion. We have already taken up conversion of some important lines where the traffic densities are high and urgent relief is needed. I refer particularly to the conversion from Viramgam to Okha in Gujarat and Barabanki to Samastipur in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Contrary to what some Members have said, the work on these projects is proceeding apace and the Budget estimates provide Rs. 6.43 crores for Viramgam to Okha and Rs. 14.17 crores for Barabanki to Samastipur.

Both the conversion projects are expected to be completed by 1977, as scheduled.

To have the full benefits of the Barabanki-Samastipur conversion, it has to be extended to the east from Samastipur to Katihar and also from Bongaigaon to Gauhati in Assam and towards north from Samastipur to Raxaul, the frontier of Nepal.

These projects are under active consideration and for sanction of the requisite funds, I shall come to the House again.

The Delhi-Ahmedabad metre gauge route is reaching the saturation point and, therefore, needs conversion. The survey for this is in progress. This large project of conversion will, inter alia, also accelerate the pace of development in Rajasthan. Another important project for conversion is the extension of the conversion from Miraj to Londa, and Hospet to Goa for facilitating the increased export of iron ore, through Goa Port and also for developing adequate capacity in connection with the setting up of the Vijayanagar Steel Complex in the area. The earlier surveys carried out are at present being up-dated to get the present picture of cost and return. Investigations have also been completed for the new line-cum-conversion project, Karur-Dindigul-Madurai-Tuticorin-Tirunelveli (in Tamil Nadu), which has been proposed to serve the growing needs of the Tuticorin Port and Fertilizer Complex being set up there as also for the fast developing central industrial belt of the Southern Peninsula. A decision on this has also to be taken early.

These are some of the important projects on which I will bestow serious attention and try to implement as much as I can.

### **Drought Relief Works**

Members from Mysore, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Andhra pleaded for taking up of new lines for drought relief. In Gujarat we have already in progress very important works like Virar-Ahmedabad electrification, Viramgaon-Okha conversion, Viramgaon-Shahibag doubling, Sabarmati-Gandhinagar new lines, etc. Earthwork on these projects is being stepped up to afford maximum relief to the drought affected people.



If found justified after investigations, it may be possible to take up early some earthwork as drought relief on some stretches of the conversion projects from Delhi to Ahmedabad, and from Miraj to Londa and Hospet to Goa, to give relief to the drought-stricken people of Rajasthan and Mysore. There are already many projects of doubling, apart from the Guntakal-Bangalore conversion in Andhra, which could be speeded up to give better drought relief in the area. This would, of course, be done when normal conditions are restored.

### Restoration of Lines

During the discussions I have referred to the restoration of the lines dismantled due to ravages of rivers and other causes. After all, but for the abandoning of these rail links due to some cause or other they would have continued to function as an integral part of the railway system serving the growing needs of the region and it is only natural for the public to demand their restoration.

I have, therefore, decided that these restorations, wherever the riverine conditions have since stabilized, must be taken up in right earnest. This will open new areas and bring about economic recovery in the backward belt.

In my speech I mentioned that a number of important works of new lines and conversions were presently under examination and active consideration. Since I did not want to lose time in taking up these works and projects as soon as they were approved by the Government, I have sought the permission of the House to finance them by re-appropriation of funds granted by the Parliament for 1973-74, and to come up to Parliament with a Supplementary Demand, if any, in due course.

I would like to clarify that this procedure is intended to be followed in respect of preliminary expenditure which might have to be incurred on detailed surveys and investigations of these works as well as on their execution in the next financial year.

### Wagon Supply

May I say a word about the position of wagons also?

Despite heavy odds and serious dislocation of train movement in various parts of the country on account of strikes, bundhs, power shedding, severe drought conditions, and a number of political agitations, etc., the latest being the troubles in Andhra Pradesh for over three months, the Railways have done a tremendous job in the last few months in the movement of goods traffic.



They had to carry more of foodgrains over longer distances to meet the acute food shortage in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Bengal, Bihar, Mysore and Kerala. Fertilizers had to be rushed on a crash programme basis to different areas before the sowing season so as to maximize food production during the Rabi season, and I am glad to say that demands for wagons for movement of fertilizers have been fully met. Even cattle fodder has had to be moved in much larger quantities. We had also to cater for movement of water by rail for drought-affected areas.

On account of the power crisis caused primarily by drop in hydro-generation and other troubles in different power houses, enormously increased quantities of coal had to be rushed to thermal power stations to maintain and improve generation.

Notwithstanding all these special moves and the consequent heavy burden, the Railways have moved more of coal for steel plants as well as for other public users, more of finished steel, more of foodgrains, fertilizers and petroleum products to the extent of 5 million tonnes in the first 10 months so far over the corresponding period of last year.

Except for the first quarter of this year, supply of wagons for the movement of cement has been practically full on demand. If there is shortage of cement in some parts of the country today, it is not due to want of wagons.

I have instructed that in order to meet the needs of seasonal traffic in different parts of the country, an increasing number of special trains carrying seasonal commodities like foodgrains, jute, cotton, sugar, tea, potatoes, etc., should be run on a top priority basis.

#### **“Commodity Specials”**

Running of these specials will be arranged keeping in view the interests of the growers, consumers and distribution agencies. Supply of wagons for these “Commodity Specials” will be done on a preferential basis.

Another idea that I have asked the Railway Board to revive is the creation of coal dumps in different parts of the country to cater to the needs of smaller consumers. I have sought the cooperation of my colleague, the Minister of Mines and Steel, who has already initiated action in this regard, so that movement of coal could be augmented by arranging bulk movement to different areas from where movement over shorter distances will be arranged by road.

Yet another scheme which is now being developed by the Railway Board is in regard to the running of a super-fast parcel train between Delhi and Howrah. This train will be run like any other Express on this route and will carry all parcel traffic, a part of which is now moving by



different Mail/Express trains. One direct benefit of this scheme will be that the parcel vans now being carried by Mail/Express trains will be transferred to this new train and instead additional third class passenger coaches will be attached to these Mail/Express trains. This scheme will, therefore, have the twin benefit of speeding up the movement of parcel traffic and of providing more accommodation for third class passengers on Mail and Express trains.

If this experiment is found successful, similar arrangements would be made on other trunk routes like Delhi-Bombay, Delhi-Madras, Bombay-Howrah, etc.

I would like to convey to the Hon'ble Members that the Railways have taken a number of steps to improve transit time of wagons in order to give better service to the customers. Longer trains with 44 bogies or 110 wagons hauled by double electric or diesel engines have been introduced to carry coal to distant places. Super Express goods trains have been introduced between important trading centres on nominated days.

Export Specials from Amritsar to Bombay were introduced last year and these have become exceedingly popular with the exporters. More and more goods trains on important trunk routes are being dieselized to accelerate movement.

I am aware that there is still some quantum of unfulfilled demand, particularly of coal for brick burning. I can assure the House that no effort will be spared to meet this demand also. However, I take this opportunity to request all sections in the House to realize the extremely difficult conditions under which our staff have been working in the field, and I would request the House to record their appreciation for the sense of dedication displayed by the railwaymen.

#### **Better Punctuality**

Some Members raised the question of punctuality of Mail and Express trains. I am glad to inform the House that the improved standards of punctuality, particularly of Mail and Express trains, achieved after a special drive from the later part of 1971, has been maintained at a fairly high level since then. There has been considerable improvement in the punctuality of Mail/Express trains on the Northeast Frontier, Eastern and South Eastern Railways during the last six months as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year. Apart from drives initiated by these Railways, improvement of punctuality on these Railways has also been partly due to general improvement in the law and order position in the areas served by them. On other Railways, punctuality has been ranging between 80 and 90 per cent.



In recent months, punctuality has been affected adversely by the strike of the loco-running staff on Southern Railway in September 1972, widespread agitations in Andhra Pradesh since October 1972, strike of the staff of Electricity Board of Uttar Pradesh during January this year, frequent power cuts and increased alarm chain pulling.

The enormity of the problem that has recently been felt of alarm chain pulling can be gauged from the fact that during November and December 1972, the total number of alarm chain pulling cases which affected punctuality was above 18,000 as compared to about 13,000 during the corresponding months of 1971. Despite some of these factors beyond the control of Railways and temporary setbacks, the Railways as a whole have been able to sustain a satisfactory performance in the punctuality of Mail/Express trains. A general sense of alertness at all levels is having a salutary effect on the running of other passenger trains.

The punctuality of selected important Mail/Express trains is being watched daily at the Railway Board's level, and I must assure the Hon'ble Members of the House that it would be my endeavour to see that the 'Punctuality' problem is treated on a priority basis.

#### **New Types of Coaches**

A word about third class travel. Action has been taken to put into service additional coaches for third class passengers. It is hoped that by the end of the Fourth Plan, another 1,177 B.G. and 247 M.G. coaches would be made available to meet the additional traffic requirements.

Action has also been taken to put into service new types of coaches in order to increase the capacity. We have plans in hand to extend the use of first class chair cars for accommodating 48/60 passengers meant for medium and short distance passengers respectively. At present, the first class coach of the conventional type has 22/24 berths. Similarly 48-berth two-tier air-conditioned sleeper coaches will replace the first class coaches for long distance passengers. By the introduction of the chair cars and air-conditioned 48-berth coaches on selected routes, it would be possible to release accommodation on the trains for attaching more third class coaches than exist now.

Another step taken is to introduce, as an experimental measure, B.G. double-decker third class coaches to seat 136 passengers for inter-city travel over medium distances. As has been announced earlier, the second class accommodation is being progressively abolished and converted to third class accommodation. The steps indicated will, therefore, increase the capacity for third class passengers.

The need for proper maintenance and cleanliness of coaches, including



lights, fans and other amenity fittings, will receive my special attention.

Frequent inspections will be carried out by Railway officers to ensure proper maintenance of coaches in workshops, primary and secondary depots and at starting and intermediate stations. Special drives will be conducted every year for a period of two months from April 15 to June 15 for focussing attention on proper maintenance of coaches.

In order to feel the pulse of the travelling public, at originating stations, the opinions of passengers will be obtained in regard to maintenance and cleanliness.

#### **Catering Services**

Some Members have criticized catering services on the Railways. No doubt, quite a lot can be done to improve these services. The Hon'ble Members would be aware of the determined efforts made by the Railways to improve these services and the recent experiments made in introducing picking up of pre-cooked meals on certain trains. These have been widely appreciated and these will be extended to other trains. I am also introducing low-priced packed meals and I am sure these will become popular.

As I have stated in my Budget speech, it is my intention to give special treatment to students and youths in railway journeys in addition to what is already available to them. I intend to issue liberal concessional tickets for long journeys and make arrangements for running of special trains for them alone. They would be taken round places of historical importance and also centres of industry. These young men will see the new India emerging.

#### **Crimes on Railways**

The high incidence of murder, dacoity and robbery in passenger trains as well as the large number of cases of theft of passengers' property has been causing me considerable concern. I frequently get letters from the public; from passengers' associations and other public bodies who express their anxiety at the growing insecurity of rail travel.

As the Hon'ble Members know, law and order being a subject in the State List of the Constitution, protection of life and property of the passengers travelling by the railways is the responsibility of the State Police in general and the Government Railway Police in particular. The provision of escorts on running trains comes within the purview of the Crime Duties of the Government Railway Police. The Railways are paying a sum of nearly Rs. 3 crores annually to the State Police as their contribution towards the maintenance of the Government Railway Police and when such



a large amount is being spent, the Railways and the general public naturally expect a greater amount of protection while travelling. It is, therefore, necessary that some stern and effective measures need to be taken to curb the incidence of such crimes in order to engender a feeling of security and confidence amongst the travelling public, particularly in the States of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

I have invited the Home Ministers along with senior Police officers of the five States, viz. West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Assam and Orissa, to a meeting on 21st March, 1973 to discuss measures to reduce the incidence of such crimes. I do hope that as a result of all these discussions, we will be able to evolve some concrete measures to check these crimes.

The Railways have passed through a difficult year. The agitations in Assam and Andhra have adversely affected operation and revenues. The drought and power cut have caused more difficulties. Though law and order conditions have improved in eastern India, there is need for much more improvement in security for the travelling public and the freight in transit.

The Railwaymen have done a commendable job under very difficult conditions. I congratulate them.

#### **The Railway Board**

Sir, may I say a word about the Railway Board also?

Attacks have been made on senior officers of the Railways, especially the Railway Board. These are not helpful to the healthy traditions that we are striving to set up.

Why should we be so much concerned about the Railway Board? What is it after all? It is a body of five senior officers — four of the rank of Secretary and one that of Principal Secretary.

There are other Ministries also in the Government of India where we have Secretaries and a Principal Secretary. There is nothing special about this body. If there is anything special, it is only this that it meets jointly and takes decisions on important issues on the spot.

In a democratic set up like ours, Parliament is sovereign and supreme and it represents the 'Will' of the people. It is the duty of the Minister to implement the policies and directives as laid down by the Parliament. The Railway Board has no option but to implement the policy and decision as laid down by the Minister in his capacity as an executive agent of the Parliament.

With the Hon'ble Members of the House I would like to share one feeling of mine and this is that it is no use quarrelling with our own tools nor it is wise to condemn them.



I will seek indulgence of the House to say that the Board Members and other senior officers are a hard working and dedicated lot of men who have worked their way up after serving in the field most of their service. They are all struggling to move the traffic under difficult conditions. While reviewing the work of the Railways, I would plead for a balanced view. Let us not look only at the mistakes and deficiencies. Let us also acknowledge the good work done as some Hon'ble Members have said. Of course, Railways must strive to improve their service further, get more work out of their assets and reduce waste and losses. I am one with the Members of this House on this issue.

#### Further Relief

Sir, before I sit down, I would like to say that I have considered the points made by the Hon'ble Members in this House very carefully. While framing Budget proposals, I had taken special care to see that the needs of the common man are not adversely affected and the modest revision of freights and fares should not have any significant effect on the cost of living. However, in the light of the various points made by Hon'ble Members in this House and the other House, I feel I could go a step further in relieving the burden on the common man.

I accordingly propose that third class fares up to and including a distance of 20 kms, instead of 15 kms as suggested by me earlier, should be exempted from increase. This will apply both to ordinary passenger trains and to Mail and Express trains. This would benefit some 140 million more third class passengers. In all, including 500 million passengers mentioned by me earlier, there will be some 640 million passengers or 42 per cent of the total third class travelling public, excluding season ticket holders, who will not have to pay any increase.

As regards freight rates, I propose that firewood, charcoal, gur, shakkar and jagri should be exempted from the increase in freight rates. These are all essential commodities used by the common man mainly.

Even though all these measures would increase the gap of Rs. 8.65 crores to Rs. 9.80 crores, I am sure, the House will welcome these reliefs.

Thank you.



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# The Heritage of India

(L.N. MISHRA COMMEMORATION VOLUME)

*Chief Editor*

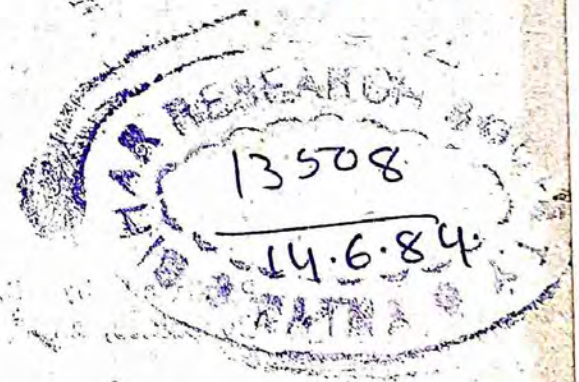
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